

# AN ORATION

DELIVERED ON 4th JULY, 1811,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

BEFORE

**The '76 Association;**

By Benjamin A. Markley,

*CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA.*

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# O\_R A T I O N.

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*Friends & Fellow-Citizens,*

WITH what a delightful influence must the beauteous and placid features of Liberty now sway the affections of your hearts—with what irresistible fervency must the enumeration of her various blessings make every bosom glow! Indeed, fellow-citizens, enthusiasm alone can teach the breast to feel sufficiently the dignity and glory of this illustrious day. Splendid indeed in the archives of history will be its transmission—sublime to afflicted nations its brilliant example—inestimable to our latest posterity its extended privileges. At a period like this, happy it is for the cause of humanity, that one nation can yet convene to celebrate its liberties and speak of the benefits with which it is blessed:—With us, indeed, remains “humanity’s last hope;” for even now, when, like the freedom of Asia and Africa (which alas! have long ceased to adorn the world with republicks) the freedom of Europe lies prostrate before the tyrant’s sway—Even now, freedom is here dispensing her choicest gifts, diffusing peace and plenty, and making you emphatically the only

happy people upon earth. Now the consequences of this day illustrate its excellence; evincing, that if these states were yet colonies, they would be engulfed by hostilities—the servants of ever-warring Britain, and suffering the heaviest burdens of the contest. The efforts of their industry would now be dissipated to supply the extravagance of lordly minions—the bravery and numbers of their sons expended in destructive and unnecessary wars; the British navy, those floating prisons of the ocean, would be the receptacle of thousands of our countrymen. Like the provinces of Rome, we should wage the battles of a distant country, without partaking the glory of success; but, like them, feel more poignantly the miseries of defeat—Yes, fellow-citizens, were it not for the magnanimous achievements of this day, no honors or sovereignty would adorn and dignify our country; she would now be one immense magazine from which would unceasingly flow warlike supplies, making a proud nation extravagant and wild with power, and assisting to disturb the repose of the most distant shores. Happy for our country! thrice propitious to the world are the magnanimous achievements of this day!

Yet, fellow-citizens, so closely are the interests of man united, that although we possess a Constitution and laws which protect and defend our rights; though we dwell on shores remote from

the blood-stained horrors of war, we feel, not by adversity, but by some privations in the redundancy of our prosperity, the afflictions of the world. Descended from a nation whose insatiable thirst for riches has taught her to explore the most sequestered countries, we appear to have inherited her passion, to be urged on by an irresistible power, to the acquirement of inordinate wealth. With the twofold sinews of agriculture and commerce we would leap into an early and great maturity. However dangerous it may be to hasten with too great rapidity towards our achme, and however commerce may have this tendency, yet it has inestimable advantages to a young people, who seek improvement wherever to be found, and whose wealth is not yet so vast as to sink them into the pomp of lordly indolence. For these reasons, fellow-citizens, we claim a portion of the commerce of the world. No injuries (reiterated as they have been and may yet prove) received from the European belligerents, shall ever compel us to renounce our claim; no power, however overwhelming, shall force us to withhold our right—a right, free as the common air we breathe, equal as the freedom of man, inestimable as our dearest privilege—It is like life itself, a gift of that heaven, which has wisely ordained, that the productions of each particular nation, should add to the convenience of all. A gift which creates a mutual dependance

and consequent courtesy, between civilized nations, thereby rendering them regardful of each other, suppressing the wildness of passion, with the bands of self-interest, and averting the condition of savage tribes. among whom, war with all its calamities more frequently prevail, and predatory invasions on the territories of each other, are the violent means of procuring, what among civilized nations, calmly flows through the channels of commerce. We claim it as a gift, which increases the lustre of the arts and sciences, by concentrating the lights and discoveries of all, in each particular nation. The progress of human knowledge is slow, even when aided by the united efforts of philosophers. A principle discovered in one country, may perfect a science in another—Had not a Des Cartes existed, Newton might have died unknown. And above all, we claim it as a gift which widely disseminates the beneficent principles of divine religion: the laws of nations recognize, and the face of nature herself loudly speaks the equal possession of this right by all men. Or why do the seas roll around so large a portion of the globe? How many more independent nations might exist if land occupied where the waters inhabit; or how much more retired should we be, if instead of oceans dreary deserts intervened! View the wilds of Asia and Africa, and behold the vast tracts of those countries in a measure lost to

mankind, which if they bordered on the sea, would be populous and powerful. No—nature speaks, the oceans were not created to refresh by evaporation alone, the rivers were not taught to meander but to fertilize and beautify; a wise providence designed them as the great high roads between man and man, that the nations of the earth might become as one people, and universal toleration and charity prevail.

From this high road of communion with our fellow men, what power shall exclude us? Shall the orders of that nation whose fleets burden the ocean? Or the edicts of that man whose armies make the earth groan, and satiate the devouring grave, compel us to cease the usage of this common right? If the warm blood of life yet animated our ancestors, who were roused to arms by “the paltry sum of three pence,”\* because it was the badge of servitude, how would they feel if the powers of foreign nations were exerted to imprison them within their homes, marking their shores as the limits of their commerce, arrogating to themselves omnipotent power, and assuming the language of the Deity, “thus far shalt thou come and no farther.” With that irresistible energy with which they burst the shackles which were thrown upon them; with that immortal patriotism which urged them, even when overwhelmed by

\* See Mr. Burke's Speech on American Taxation.

the disasters of war, to raise themselves above the tide of calamity, and to declare themselves a free and independant people, they would boldly break forth from the bounds of their imprisonment, and in a language more effectual than the mild sentences of diplomatic negociation, they would demand the liberty of the seas, as they once demanded the freedom of their country. For the impartial observer touched by no bias for either France or England, but regarding alone the justice of things, must be impressed with wonder at our marvellous forbearance and hurried into these observations—"What indignities has America not suffered!—her ships despoiled, herself dishonored, her citizens insulted, impressed and murdered by one belligerent, imprisoned and their property sequestered by another; and yet no power exerted to save or release—no avenging arm uplifted to redress the multiplied aggressions—the reiterated insults which she has endured. By each injury the glow is awakened on the patriot's cheek to fade like the blush of a flower which wastes its sweetness—the sacred feelings of patriotism and national honor are left to pine away in inactivity and sloth." Although these are the remarks into which all who review the conduct of the belligerent powers must be hurried, yet every reflecting man who adverts to experience, must observe that there are certain periods in which the world at

large is afflicted—when nations deeply convulsed by hostilities will extend the shocks of their paroxysms to those with whom they are connected—when even the pillars of society are shaken to their foundations—As when an Alexander rages, a Cæsar “lets slip the dogs of war,” a Charlemagne extends his depopulated empire, and a Napoleon wages exterminating warfare—In such dreadful times, “when blood and destruction are so in use, and pity choked with custom of fell deeds,” that ruler is most wise and useful, who is most successful in lessening the evils to which the nation is exposed, and rendering it comparatively happy. But this amiable temper and philanthropic course may be too far extended; for it is vain to endeavor to suppress the unpleasant truth which forces itself irresistably upon the mind, that should our country tamely submit to such exertions of power, we are no longer a free and independent people—The glory of this sacred and illustrious day would fade away—the Genius of America would drop tears on the record traced by the pencil of Clio. The valorous spirits of revolutionary heroes would weep over the untimely autumn of their country.

Far be it from me on this day of festivity to obscure your joy or to rouse your anger; this continued sufferance of our country is rather noticed as a possible than feared as a probable event. Peace is the presiding genius of our republic, and



we are ever unwilling to sully her fleecy mantle with the crimson stains of war: on her altar we have sacrificed our anger; and it is her persuasive eloquence which has thus far withheld us from hostilities; for she bids us observe the happiness of the cottage smiling amid the verdure of the valley—the calmness of the village marked in the prospect by the glittering spire—the opulence of your cities, satisfying every wish of man. She bids us beware too precipitately exposing these blessings, lest we see the lovely cottage dismantled of its charms, and its industrious inhabitant abandoning his field for the camp, bidding perhaps a last adieu to his solitary wife and helpless children; lest we behold the glittering spire which marked the peaceful village clothed in conflagration, and even the sacred house of God destroyed by the ruthless arm of war; lest we see the splendid city crumbling into ashes, and its once happy inhabitants agrieved by the ravages of pestilence and famine. And who can view his beloved land adorned with the blessings of peace and not feel such salutary admonitions? Who would not rather temper his anger with patience, than too precipitately engulf his country in these dreadful calamities? Let us rather turn the angry brow from our foreign connections, and soften the asperity of our feelings by viewing the numerous blessings which endear our homes. Let us re-

member we are the happiest people upon earth; enjoying a constitution the most salutary; laws the most wholesome and effectual; possessing every internal moral cause to advance our felicity; it would be ingratitude to withhold the joy we pay as an annual tribute to the shrine of departed worth. Possessing a country situated far distant from the commotions of the world, expressing by the luxuriance of its fields and groves its wonderful fertility, and by the sweetly attemper'd air, its excellence of climate, without emotions of thankfulness and joy, we should treat with impiety the beneficence of God—

For in this land where nature's robe outspreads,  
 Where forests wave, and mountains lift their heads,  
 Where late the wigwam its rude structure rear'd,  
 And yelling savages their red arms bar'd;  
 Behold how freedom's wand rebukes the scene!  
 See the woods fade; while brighter beauties beam,  
 The village, waving field, and glittering stream,  
 Peace with her halcyon charms withholds from strife  
 While cities burst with sudden spring to life.

And, fellow-citizens, what additional joys must we experience on this day, from viewing the inhabitants of South-America rising with a sublimity of soul equal to the grandeur with which nature has ornamented their country, and from their proud elevations declaring themselves to the world free and independent nations—Though shackled by a cunning priesthood, and oppressed

by rapacious governors, lifting themselves to the native dignity of man, bursting the trammels of superstition, and exiling the demon of political slavery. With what wonder must Europe behold the unexpected energy; with what proud joy must we view this noble imitation of the example of this illustrious day. In vain did the incredible fertile fields of Paraguay afford a redundant plenty which luxury itself could not consume; in vain did the shores of that southern continent glitter with wealth; its Andes proudly elevate the nations towards heaven, and nature herself suspend her laws in its favor, making its tropical latitudes as genial as these temperate climes. Man was shackled though nature around was unboundedly free and sublime; he of all God's fair creatures was without dignity, the crouching slave of avarice, the timid child of superstition, the victim of political heresy. It is surely an accession of glory to this distinguished day, thus to have pointed the way to freedom's fane, and thus widely to have extended the sphere of the genius of universal emancipation. The imagination takes fire at the sublime moral phenomenon; to behold from the lakes of the north to the Terra del Fuego of the south; from the boisterous Atlantic to the characteristic Pacific ocean; over all the mountains, amid all the vallies throughout this unrivalled ex-

tent of territory, naught but nations of freemen,\* millions upon millions breathing the common air of liberty, and in annual commemoration innumerable hosts upon hosts shouting the praises of our beneficent goddess! Has the world ever exhibited a spectacle so sublime? Has the millenium commenced its career on this most noble portion of the globe?—In comparison, the Greece of antiquity, with its illustrious though small republics, sinks into insignificance; the splendors of ancient Rome vanish; and the modern Lucca, Florence, Genoa, Venice, and even Switzerland (the land I cannot name without admiration and sorrow) fade, like a receding shore, in the unequal comparison. Nature's God who has created America on the grandest scale, will elevate her inhabitants to the proudest condition. On a theme so vast, viewing a prospect so interminable, can this language be deemed extravagant? From the unfailing delineations of geography; from the ample page of history, "rich with the spoils of time," the mind arises with the glowing conviction, that in no age or country, never since the creation, has the world witnessed so sublime a spectacle.

From viewing the splendid condition to which America has arisen in the course of three centu-

\* Brazil forms the only exception; and the period may not be distant when this exception may cease to exist. Brazil has frequently exhibited a disposition for independence, and the influence of principles now received by all the surrounding nations, cannot be long resisted.

ries, we will turn to the primitive times of our young history—To retrace the difficulties with which our ancestors contended on leaving their native country for these savage shores, is still amusing and instructive, though novelty has long ceased to adorn the story with its magic charms. The boisterous sea, which to the early navigator appeared interminable, the rugged coast, and terrific appearance of its sanguinary inhabitant, the severity of climate destroying the first efforts of their industry, were all successfully overcome by their hardy enterprise. Armed with the divine and impregnable buckler of religion, they knew no fear; under the protection of their eternal Father the inhospitable shore was to them an asylum; the yell of the savage was less terrific than the cries of intolerance and persecution. Beneath their plastic energy the wilderness was soon transformed into a garden, and their offspring dispersed like rays of lights; penetrated the interior recesses of the country, and bore with them the genial influence of that celestial element. But scarcely had they put forth the bud of promise, blushing with the tints of an early prosperity, ere it was crushed by the rude arm of unfeeling hostility. And who were the warlike enemy that assailed the childhood of their political existence? Were they the savage tribes which dwelt on their frontier, spreading desolation and sparing neither

age nor sex? Or the restless power of France exciting revolt, and overleaping the bounds of the adjacent colony? or what un pitying foe, thus destroyed the glittering spring of the people, who had borne the inclement peltings of the winter of adversity? No: it was not the hostile Indian, or enterprising Canadian, or any other natural foe— It was the unnatural mother-country who blighted the prosperity of her children; she it was who trammelled their enterprise, suppressed their genius, and would have enslaved their liberty. They poured the fruits of their industry into her lap, and sought her countenance; they petitioned for clemency, deprecated the necessity of war, and solicited the parent to exert her wisdom and avert so painful an alternative. Their prayers were considered the prayers of the weak, and were therefore unheeded; they were scoffed at and threatened with the scourge. Troops were disembarked in their country, and citizens were slain— Then the nation arose, the flashes of war gleamed, and as hostilities thickened, the savage Indian arrayed with instruments of torture rather than weapons of honorable warfare, and the foreign mercenary, were thrown by our inhuman foe into our country, to assist in more widely extending desolation and carnage; here humanity would draw the veil, and leave to healing time wounds already cicatrized. But where shall we find lan-

guage to tell the invincible energy with which our countrymen asserted their rights, and resisted the unnatural warfare? For seven painful and disastrous years—from the first rupture at Lexington, to the capitulation at York-Town; in every district of our country, deeds of valour distinguished our cause. Stedfast as the principles on which they founded their demands, true as the religion on which they rested their hopes, and immoveable as the rocks which guarded their shores from the encroachments of the ocean, our fathers stood the bulwark of liberty unsubdued by the most afflicting calamities. Even then did the world witness what was deemed an event above the condition of mortals, a nation convened to deliberate, with the lights of science and the experience of all ages before them, on the best form of government for advancing human happiness, and even while waging war simultaneously arising in all its energy and native dignity and firmly declaring the independence and freedom we celebrate. Never has man witnessed on the great theatre of the world a war so distinguished by the dignity of its cause—the grandeur of its action—the virtue and valour of its warriors! History is lavish of praise, and dwells with fond enthusiasm on the transactions of little fragments of nations which, under the influence, I had almost said within the limited presence of one man, have arisen to distinction

and glittered in the annals of fame—But what must be her language, on viewing a people distributed over a vast extent of territory; dwelling in various climes; marked by strong moral distinctions, yet all assuming in the cause of freedom one cast of character; uniting as it were by a miraculous influence, and pledging to each other their lives, fortunes and sacred honors, to support their common independence—To behold them struggling and suffering in one common cause, and finally emerging to the splendors of success, without the discord of party to sever, or the intoxication of victory to betray, into those excesses to which nations possessed of great power, without being habituated to the restrictions of long established laws, are so prone. But with wisdom deliberate as their valour, regulating the political system, healing the wounds inflicted by hostilities; and lifting before the eyes of an astonished world, the halcyon lustre, unsullied by the mists of anarchy—

But the light of peace, like that of the morning sun falling on a metropolis which through the night has suffered conflagration and insurrection, exhibited the country strewed with ruins and dismantled of its charms; the city, the village, and the cottage, were alike clothed in ashes; the once fertile fields overgrown with rank herbage, and the spot

“ Where once the garden smil'd,

“ And still where many a garden flower grew wild,”



incumbered with wild and thistly weeds. These were the melancholy features of our desolated country. Oh! if we could justly appreciate the sufferings of those times which afflicted our land with these scenes of dilapidation; those times when our fathers were driven from their homes, and our mothers wandered over their country without knowing what spot would afford safety from the open foe, or more dangerous because traitorous enemy! With what exquisite sensibility would we estimate our present felicity, with what gratitude would our hearts dilate to God who gifted our country with heroes to perfect these inestimable blessings! It was amid those adverse storms, Washington, our political saviour and common father, was seen, like a brilliant meteor hovering in a mist, waring amid the lowering gloom with a mind wholly devoted to his country's freedom, and ever diffusing around his presence the lustre of success. "What can language do" to tell the greatness of this illustrious man! "Where find words" descriptive of his immortal fame! The poet has panegyrised, the philosopher steadfastly admired, and the orator fervently declared in the spirit of historical truth, "that a character of so many virtues tempering each other and so wholly unalloyed by vices, is hardly to be found in the pages of history;"\* the hoary headed sage shakes

\* Mr. Fox's History.

his silver locks assenting to every encomium; the child lisps his name in accents of veneration; all but tyrants who are abashed by his virtues regard him as "the most noble man that ever lived in the tide of time."\* But where rests the common father of his country? Has no Phidias arisen with the inspiration of genius, to adorn his sepulchre? Will no American Praxiteles arise to give his honoured image to his country, glowing under the animating chissel with the expressions of life? Will no artist transmit his name to distant ages connected with such deathless fame? Our common father sleeps unnoticed, and nature more kind than his country, adorns his sequestered tomb each spring with foliage, and sheds in autumn the yellow and seared leaf upon his grave.

In those trying times, and among the most zealous patriots, Warren fell on Bunker's Hill, "the first in danger as the first in fame." Our historian cotemporary with these transactions, declares with the ardour of those times "that like Hampden he lived, like Hampden he died, universally beloved and universally regretted."† Montgomery, who in the depth of winter with toil and suffering traversed the snows of inclement Canada, fell before the walls of Quebeck, and has left a character so distinguished by wisdom, virtue and valour, it is difficult to say to which exalted trait his country

\* Shakspeare.

† Ramsay's History.

is most indebted. Mercer and Wooster also bled for their country, and shall never be forgotten. The name of martyred Hayne is deeply graven on our hearts, and awakens the keenest sensibility for his wrongs, and the warmest admiration for his heroism. And those enthusiastic sons of liberty who left their homes to fight her battles on these remote shores, who, with the spirit of chivalric heroism, sought her standard reared in whatever clime—To thee, Pulaskie, De Kalb, Steuben, La Fayette, on this day we effuse our warmest gratitude. Such were the distinguished men called forth by our revolutionary struggles; and as our general Congress at Philadelphia, “were considered equal to any nation or body of men on the records of history,”\* so the chiefs of our armies may be regarded as the most distinguished heroes that ever supported and ennobled a virtuous cause:

“ Ah! Would the muse could drop a tear

“ Distinct on every hero’s bier!

“ Well pleased the embalming dew to shed

“ On every patriot’s cherished head!

“ But many a name has envious time

“ Snatch’d from the fame-bestowing rhyme.”†

Fellow-Citizens, having thus endeavored to bring to your view the most striking reflections which this illustrious day suggests; having adverted to the injuries of our country; having more willingly endeavored to exhibit its various bles-

\* Lord Chatham’s Speech on the removing the troops from Boston.

† Miss Holford’s battle of Falkirk.

sings; to shew, as the torch of liberty is extinguished in Europe, it is re-illuminated in America: having concisely reviewed the troubles of our revolution, and offered our grateful remembrance to the shrine of departed excellence, we will now fondly dilate on the sacred feelings of exalted liberty. On this day, what is that tremulous and pleasing emotion, which, with the scintillations of sensibility, moves in our bosoms—warms the martial mind, and with its magic influence touches the heart quivering with joy? It is LIBERTY, that celestial spirit which has produced every thing grand and sublime in the moral world; which has adorned Sparta with a Leonidas, Athens with a Demosthenes, and exalted imperial Rome to the summit of earthly dignity. Where has this all-powerful spirit existed without ennobling man—It reared a “Brutus refulgent from the stroke of Cæsar’s fate;”<sup>\*</sup> a Tell amid the Alps; a Wallace in Caledonia; a Hampden and a Sidney in Albion; an Emmet in Hibernia; and a host of immortal men in this our country. It gives the wings of genius to the soul and invigorates every native energy. Fired by its virtuous enthusiasm the warrior moves resistless—the sculptor, the painter, and the poet immortalize themselves. It is the handmaid of victorious eloquence; behold its brilliant trophies in the orator of Athens—“See

<sup>\*</sup> Akenside,

him rousing his countrymen, and with the commanding energy of his voice fulminating over all Greece and causing the throne of Macedon to tremble before him.”\* It elicits

“ That pathetic eloquence, which moulds  
 “ Th’ attentive senate; charms, persuades, exalts;  
 “ Of honest zeal the indignant lightning throws,  
 “ And shakes corruption on her venal throne.”†

Nor is the humble cottage ungloried by its holy beams—There it diffuses around the rural board, dignity, conscious equality, security, and content. This is the blessed spirit of our distinguishable land. We will preserve it for its intrinsic excellences. We will venerate it as the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, which conducted our illustrious countrymen through the glooms of our glorious revolution. For its preservation, we will invoke the sages of our country, to rise like the venerable Nestor and soften the asperity of party, to heal all political disunion, to make the nation whole and undivided, all yielding their support to government; none so vile as to withhold his aid, or to seek at this momentous period to render ineffectual its salutary laws. We will invoke the youths who glow with love of country, to prepare themselves by every species of discipline to defend it, with the irresistible powers of oratory in the council, or with the shield and sword in the field of battle. We will call on the fair of Ame-

\* Abercrombie.

† Thomson.

nea to array their beauty and virtue in its defence, to imitate their illustrious mothers who fanned the drooping flame of patriotism in adverse times, to encourage with their smiles the youth seen struggling up

“The steep where fame’s proud temple shines afar.” *Beattie.*

And when mothers, to infuse in the tender minds of their children a zealous love of country; to fill them with virtuous emulation, and each becoming a Cornelia, together rear a generation of the Gracchi, an ornament and support to the republic. Sacred Spirit of religion, we will call on *thee* to be its guard, spread before it thine immortal shield, for without thy hallowed protection it cannot be preserved—For when Rome became atheistical, and Lucretius distilled in honied strains the poisonous principles of Epicurus—When the doctrine big with horror, “that death is an eternal sleep,” was openly avowed even in her august senate—when the belief in future rewards and punishments was ridiculed as vulgar and unnecessary—when the obligations of an oath lost their efficacy; then was Rome shaken like a tree when the axe severs its roots, and soon she fell with all her clustering honours;—then the bands which link the spirit of liberty to society were cut loose, and like the refreshing exhalations of morning it left that devoted empire to the fevering oppressions of a Nero and a Caligula. France

now groaning beneath the most grinding tyranny; the nation which can neither enjoy liberty, nor permits others to enjoy it; which has torn down the lofty honors of Switzerland; trampled on the freedom of Holland, and committed excesses which stain even the crimson page of history, runs thus madly wild over Europe with desolation in her train, because Religion thy holy bands are not upon her—When she shook even the world itself in her struggles for freedom, most ardently we wish she had invoked thy tranquilizing presence, and softened her ferocity with thy benign influence. Had she opened her temples to Almighty God, the divine precepts of peace would have diffused themselves throughtout her community, and instead of Napoleon's corroding despotism, she would in all probability be blessed at this moment with peace and freedom, an ornament to the world and to us a friendly sister republic. Immortal Washington knew thy excellence, he consecrated his laurels and humbled himself before thee in the hour of victory. To his God, not to his arm he attributed success—his laudable and elevated ambition was tempered with veneration for thy awful majesty. This nation derived from thy holy lessons those salutary and inestimable qualities; that sobriety and dignity of character, which enabled it equally to avoid the shocks of power and the vortex of anarchy. To thee we owe the perfection of our liberty, not to the sword of the warrior, the tongue or pen of the statesman. And when we view these States and behold thee diffusing thyself over every department and to our remotest frontier, with cheerful civilization following in thy lustrous course; how can we withhold the happy belief, that like thee, sacred Spirit of Religion, our republic will prove IMMORTAL.